



# Tomorrow's Pioneers

*Tomorrow's Pioneers* (Arabic: **رواد الغد**, romanized: *Ruwād al-Ghad*), also known as *The Pioneers of Tomorrow*, is a Palestinian children's television show<sup>[2]</sup> that was broadcast by the Hamas-affiliated television station Al-Aqsa TV from 13 April 2007 to 16 October 2009, hosted by a young Saraa Barhoum and her co-host, a large costumed character, performing skits (or "scenes") and discussing life in Palestine in a talk show fashion with call-ins from children (typically aged 9–13 with some as young as 3).<sup>[3][4]</sup> The show is considered to be the successor to an earlier Hamas-broadcast children's radio programme titled *Ovan and Branches* (Arabic: **أفنان وأغصان**), which was also moderated by Hazim Al-Sha'arawi.<sup>[5]</sup>

Presented in a children's educational format similar to other preschool shows like *Sesame Street* or *Barney & Friends*, *Tomorrow's Pioneers* is highly controversial as it contains antisemitic, Islamist, anti-American, and other anti-Western themes. Israeli sources have characterised it as among the "most serious" of martyrdom operations.<sup>[4]</sup> The show also gained attention from Disney, who ordered that the first co-host, Farfour, be written out of the show due to his strong resemblance to Mickey Mouse.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Characters

### Saraa Barhoum (April 2007 – October 2009)

Saraa Barhoum (Arabic: **سراء برهوم**), who hosted *Tomorrow's Pioneers*, was around 10–11 years old when the show started.<sup>[3][4][7]</sup> She was invited to host the show after entering a singing competition. The show's director, Hazim Al-Sha'arawi, has stated that Saraa was the ideal choice to present the show because of the incursions, among other things, she had

### Tomorrow's Pioneers



Farfour the Mouse, co-host of the first season, mimicking an AK-47 being fired

<b>Arabic</b>	<span>رواد الغد</span>
<b>Created by</b>	<span>Hazim Al-Sha'arawi</span> <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Directed by</b>	<span>Fathi Hamad</span>
<b>Creative director</b>	<span>Samir Abu Muhssen</span>
<b>Presented by</b>	<span>Hazim Al-Sha'arawi</span>
<b>Starring</b>	<div><span>Samir Abu Muhssen</span><div><span></span></div><span>Hazim Al-Sha'arawi</span><div><span></span></div><span>Mohammad Ramadan</span><div><span></span></div></div>
<b>Country of origin</b>	<span>Palestine</span>
<b>Original language</b>	<span>Arabic</span>
<b>No. of seasons</b>	<span>4</span>
<b>No. of episodes</b>	<span>21</span>

### Production

<b>Producer</b>	<span>Samir Abu Muhssen</span>
<b>Production locations</b>	<div><span>Al-Aqsa TV</span><div><span></span></div><span>Gaza Strip</span><div><span></span></div></div>
<b>Editor</b>	<span>Hazim Al-Sha'arawi</span>
<b>Running time</b>	<span>85 minutes</span>

### Original release

<b>Network</b>	<span>Al-Aqsa TV</span>
<b>Release</b>	<div><span>13 April 2007</span> – <span>16 October 2009</span></div>

witnessed. In an interview, Saraa revealed that Israelis had struck near her house with a bombshell, injuring her feet and wounding her little brother Youssef's legs.<sup>[3]</sup> Despite the messages in *Tomorrow's Pioneers*, Saraa has explained out that the Palestinians are defending their homeland from the Israelis.<sup>[3]</sup>

During gaps between shooting *Tomorrow's Pioneers*, Saraa took the opportunity to develop her singing career. She has performed several concerts in support of her music, recorded several songs with Palestinian children's songwriter Fekry Namous, and has starred in at least one music video, which was hosted for a time at the Palestinian PALN internet network.<sup>[8]</sup> In the video, Saraa sings about the Hamas youth movement, its presence in the schools, and of the division between Israel and Palestine. The video was criticised for promoting the message "that death, not life, is the prime value".<sup>[9]</sup> In 2009, recording studio Al-Molatham shot a high-quality music video of the song "Deprived you of Attiari" (Arabic: يا من أطياري) from her first album. The video features Saraa walking through rubble and singing a plaintive song about being a mother in Palestine. Images of gravely injured infants are displayed in the background.<sup>[10]</sup>

Saraa has seven siblings, her father is a university professor<sup>[3]</sup> and her uncle, Fawzi Barhoum, is a Hamas spokesman.<sup>[11]</sup> In an August 2007 interview, Saraa said she wanted to be a doctor, and if not that, then a martyr.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Uncle Hazim (April–May 2007)

Hazim Al-Sha'arawi, the show's creator and moderator, has appeared in several episodes. The uncle of Farfour (Saraa's first co-host, a mouse), Uncle Hazim (also rendered as Uncle Hazem) often plays the role of the disciplinarian when Farfour is bad. In episode 101, he chides Farfour for speaking in English, and in episode 104, he holds Farfour initially responsible for cheating on his exam.<sup>[12]</sup> Uncle Hazim's biological and familial relations to Farfour's cousins, Nahoul the bee and Assoud the rabbit, are unclear.

## Farfour (April–June 2007)

Farfour (Arabic: فرفور; also rendered as Farfur), a Mickey Mouse-like mouse,<sup>[13]</sup> is a costumed character with a high-pitched voice who co-hosted *Tomorrow's Pioneers* with Saraa. His name comes from a diminutive of *fa'r* which means "mouse" in Arabic.<sup>[14]</sup>

On the show, Farfour has expressed controversial views, stating that "You and I are laying the foundation for a world led by Islamists"<sup>[15]</sup> and "We will return the Islamic community to its former greatness, and liberate Jerusalem, God willing, liberate Iraq, God willing, and liberate all the countries of the Muslims invaded by the murderers."<sup>[13][15]</sup> In episode 103, he simulates shooting an AK-47 and throwing grenades.<sup>[14][16]</sup>

In episode 105 (aired 22 June 2007), Farfour is beaten to death during an interrogation by an Israeli who is trying to acquire the key and title to "Tel al-Rabi", a fictional Palestinian settlement which was occupied by Israelis and renamed to Tel Aviv.<sup>[17][18]</sup> Farfour is replaced as co-host in episode 202 by Nahoul, his bumblebee cousin. The idea for the story arc involving Farfour's death came from Al-Sha'arawi.<sup>[11]</sup> It was initially claimed that the death of Farfour was intended to usher in a new direction for the show.<sup>[19]</sup>

Other Hamas children's programs, such as a 1998 episode of *The Children's Club*, have used the Mickey Mouse image to incite terror activities.<sup>[20]</sup>

## Response from Disney

The Disney corporation initially had no public statement on the use of Mickey Mouse's image in the Farfour character; Disney CEO Robert Iger later said, "We were appalled by the use of our character to disseminate that kind of message." He explained the initial quiet by saying, "I just didn't think it would have any effect... I think it should have been obvious how the company felt about the subject."<sup>[21]</sup> Walt Disney's daughter, Diane Disney Miller, commented to the press that "What we're dealing with here is pure evil and you can't ignore that." She further commented that "It's not just [about] Mickey, it's [about] indoctrinating children like this, teaching them to be evil."<sup>[22]</sup>

In a response letter, *Tomorrow's Pioneers* director, Fathi Hammad, said: "Before ... [anyone] object[s] to our [program], we are trying to install in our children's memories the interest in [the] lift[ing of] the siege on our people and [the end of] support for the usurper entity of our land and killing our children. ... [T]he Palestinian people continue to struggle not indifferent to such [as] are left with the executioner and victim."<sup>[23]</sup> Nevertheless, the show's creators arranged the production of an episode shortly after in which Farfour was martyred off to be replaced by his bumblebee brother, Nahoul. This arranged martyrdom came in direct response to actions by the Disney family.<sup>[6]</sup>

Several months later, Hamas television again made use of Disney characters, this time in a five-minute cartoon attacking Fatah. The clip depicted the competing movement and its former local leader Mohammed Dahlan as corrupt and anti-Islamic rats, while portraying Hamas as a confident lion based on the Simba character from the 1994 film *The Lion King*. While Hamas TV executive Hazam Sharawi said the clip was pulled for revising, including removal of the Dahlan depiction, he said there were no plans to remove reference to *The Lion King*.<sup>[24]</sup>

In September 2008, Fatah also began broadcasting a competing children's show on the Official Palestinian Satellite Channel (PA TV) network. This programme also featured the usage of Mickey and Minnie Mouse in an episode where children glorified Dalal Mughrabi, a young woman who participated in the 1978 Coastal road massacre.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Nahoul (July–February 2008)

Nahoul (Arabic: نحول; also rendered as Nahul or Nahool) is a costumed bumblebee character with a high-pitched voice who co-hosted *Tomorrow's Pioneers* with Saraa following Farfour's martyrdom during an Israeli interrogation. When introduced on Friday, 13 July 2007, he promised "revenge upon the enemies of God, the murderers of the prophets", explaining "I want to continue in the path of Farfour – the path of Islam, of heroism, of martyrdom, of the mujahideen."<sup>[26][27]</sup>

On the show, Nahoul has expressed terrorist views. He has stated such things as: "We will liberate Al-Aqsa from the filth of the criminal Jews",<sup>[28]</sup> and "We will go on Jihad when we grow up."<sup>[28]</sup> In episode 204, Nahoul visits the zoo, where streaks of cruelty further become apparent. After noticing some sleeping cats, Nahoul proceeds to swing them by their tails and throw them around their cage. He later throws stones into a cage of lions, taunting them with his stinger. After the incident, Saraa chastises him against doing it again, citing a story in the Hadith in which a woman went to hell for starving her cat.<sup>[29]</sup>

In February 2008, it was revealed that Nahoul was very sick and in need of an operation. Although Nahoul and his parents travelled to Al-Arish, they were denied from leaving Gaza to go to Egypt for medical treatment by Israeli authorities.<sup>[30]</sup> He dies, what the show calls "a martyr's death",<sup>[31]</sup> in the

arms of his parents. His brother was notably absent. Nahoul is replaced as co-host by Assoud, his rabbit brother.

## Assoud (February 2008 – January 2009)

Assoud (Arabic: أسود, lit. 'lion'; also rendered as Assud), a Bugs Bunny or Roger Rabbit-like rabbit character, was introduced after his brother, the previous co-host, Nahoul, died of illness.<sup>[31]</sup> In explaining why he is called Assoud, when Arnoub (Arabic: أرنوب, lit. 'rabbit') would be more appropriate, Assoud explains that "A rabbit is a term for a bad person and coward. And I, Assoud, will finish off the Jews and eat them."<sup>[30][31]</sup> Before Nahoul's death, Assoud lived in Lebanon; he returned to the homeland of Palestine in order to liberate it.<sup>[30]</sup>



Palestinian Media Watch subtitles for Assoud in his debut episode.

In the episode aired on 2 January 2009, Assoud was seen dying in a Gaza hospital after being injured in an Israeli attack.<sup>[32]</sup> On his deathbed, he tells Palestinian children that they must fight and die to liberate Haifa, Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities.<sup>[33][34]</sup> Assoud hinted in episode 302 that he would be replaced by a tiger when he was martyred.

## Nassur (February–October 2009)

Nassur, a brown bear, is the final co-host of *Tomorrow's Pioneers*, who was introduced on 13 February 2009. He claims to have come to the Gaza Strip to become one of the mujahideen and to defend the children of Palestine (although he gives evidence that he may have come from Iran). As such, he has vowed in his debut episode to join the 'Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, in which his plans include wielding a gun and performing Jihad.<sup>[35]</sup> He survives in the series finale.

## Episodes

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Due to political instability and regional conflict between Hamas and Fatah parties, the show has not maintained uninterrupted broadcasting. During the Battle of Gaza in June 2007, the Al-Aqsa TV station was taken over and shut down by Fatah gunmen.<sup>[36][37]</sup> In September 2008, Fatah also began broadcasting a competing show targeting children on the Official PA TV network.<sup>[25]</sup> Further complicating regular broadcast of *Tomorrow's Pioneers* were controversies surrounding the show itself. Palestinian Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti successfully lobbied to have the show shut down for some time, although this ban was later lifted. Factors such as these led to broadcast dates often being irregular.

*Note: With the exception of episode #20 (the fourth episode of Season 4), whose original airdate was a Tuesday, the original airdate for all other episodes was a Friday.*

## Season 1: April–June 2007

#	Total	Title	Original airdate
101	1	"Farfour Is Caught Speaking English"	13 April 2007
<p>Farfour and Saraa discuss martyrdom and the reclamation of Al-Aqsa with Sanabel, a call-in guest. Farfour and Saraa then speak with Hadil, another call-in guest, to whom Saraa explains that "the day Islam rules the world there will be justice, love, and peace, and all the people will love one another. That is history." She then discusses the goals of fasting, praying, reciting the <u>Quran</u>, and studying and speaking in classical Arabic. Later on in the episode, Farfour is caught speaking English by Uncle Hazim and is chastised. Saraa explains to Farfour that he must have pride in his Arabic language and that the Muslim culture is a dominant force in the world. Farfour tells Saraa of his intention to "[set the] cornerstone for world leadership under Islamic leadership" with "our beloved children" and Saraa responds that the show shall act as a "nucleus" for the reunification of Gaza, Jerusalem, and Ramallah into one Palestine. Farfour also teaches about the importance of prayer. Later on he states, "Yes, we, tomorrow's pioneers, will restore to this nation its glory, and we will liberate Al-Aqsa, with Allah's will, and we will liberate Iraq, with Allah's will, and we will liberate the Muslim countries, invaded by murderers." Uncle Hazim speaks of the murders of children and clarifies, "not just the Palestinian child, but also the Iraqi child, as you can see they kill and slaughter the children and the women. Whoever followed the news yesterday could see the fetus and its mother... I'm sure you saw that, Saraa." Saraa acknowledges that she had and that it was very moving. Uncle Hazim continues "they are doing it in Iraq, in <u>Afghanistan</u>, and in Palestine and a while ago they were doing it in <u>Lebanon</u>."<sup>[15][38][39][40]</sup></p>			
102	2	"Farfour Vs. Bush, Olmert, & Condoleeza"	20 April 2007
<p>Farfour reacts negatively to a song sung by call-in guest, Esraa (12). Esraa used the word "surrender" in her song and Saraa explains that they don't want to surrender, they want to win. Farfour agrees, stating: "We will win <u>Bush</u>! We will win, <u>Sharon</u>! Ah, <u>Sharon's dead</u>. We will win <u>Mofaz</u>! Mofaz left. We will win, <u>Olmert</u>! We will win! We will win, <u>Condoleeza</u>! [<i>sic</i>]"<sup>[14][40][41]</sup></p>			
103	3	"Farfour and the AK-47"	27 April 2007
<p>During a song about "answering" the Gaza Strip town of Rafah with AK-47s sung by call-in guest, Harwa (11), Farfour enacts the song in pantomime. Later, a second call-in guest, Muhammad (12) sings "Oh Jerusalem, it is the time of death". The hostess explains to Farfour that one must aspire to <u>memorise the entire Quran</u>... "Because we want to lead the world, so [therefore] we want to memorise the [entire] Quran."<sup>[16][40]</sup></p>			
104	4	"Farfour Is Caught Cheating"	11 May 2007
<p>Farfour prepares for and takes his <u>year-end examinations</u>. He <u>cheats</u> by using a <u>cheat sheet</u> during the test and is asked why by Uncle Hazim. His excuse is "Because the Jews destroyed my home and I left my books and notes under the rubble." He soon learns cheating is forbidden and fails the test. Uncle Hazim asks, "don't you want to be like the <u>Khawrizmi</u> and <u>Al-Razi</u> and <u>Ibn Sina</u>?" Farfour admits that he "would like to be <u>Hassan al Banna</u>, <u>Rantissi</u> and <u>Ahmed Yassin</u>." Uncle Hazim suggests that "we want to be scientists or <u>Jaber Ben Hayan</u>". In response, he tells viewers, "I'm calling on all children to read more and more to prepare for exams because the Jews don't want us to learn."<sup>[42][43]</sup> Uncle Hazim then explains to the audience that Islam has provided security for the world saying: "Ask history, and ask the <u>Jews</u> did they ever live in a time period better than the one they live under Islam. And ask the <u>Christians</u> how their security was assured in the churches and monasteries. Once we were. Do you remember <u>Andalus</u>?"<sup>[12][40][44]</sup></p>			
105	5	"Farfour and the Jew"	22 June 2007
<p>Farfour's grandfather explains to Farfour the history of the land. Tel Aviv, he explains, is the Jewish name for the land that was originally called Tel Al-Rabi and the Jews renamed it after occupying it in 1948. Farfour's grandfather gives Farfour the key and documents to the land and then he dies. Farfour exclaims "Grandpa entrusted me with this great trust but I don't know how to liberate this land from the filth of the criminal plundering Jews who killed my Grandpa and everybody." Farfour is then taken to an interrogation where he is "beaten to death by an actor posing as an Israeli official trying to buy Farfour's land" because Farfour had called him a "despicable terrorist." The episode has what seems to be an editorial mistake as a brief flash</p>			

of a "Farfour in prison" sign is shown immediately prior to Saraa explaining that "Farfour was martyred while defending his land, the land of his fathers and forefathers. He was martyred at the hand of the criminals, the murderers, the murderers of innocent children who killed Iman Hijo, Muhammad Al-Duro, and many others."<sup>[45][17][46][47][48]</sup>

## Season 2: July 2007 – February 2008

#	Total	Title	Original airdate
201	6	"Saraa and The Hadith"	6 July 2007
Shahad (9), a call-in guest shares a quotation from the Hadith: "The Prophet said: <u>The Hour</u> will not take place until you fight the Jews... and the rock and the tree will say: Oh, Muslim, servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and fight him!" <sup>[48][49][50]</sup>			
202	7	"Nahoul Descends"	13 July 2007
Nahoul, the bumblebee cousin of the deceased mouse Farfour, pledges to continue on his path, "the path of Islam, of heroism, of martyrdom, of the mujahideen." <sup>[27]</sup> He also explains his intentions to liberate Al-Aqsa from the impurity of the enemies of Allah. <sup>[26][48][51]</sup>			
203	8	"Nahoul's Rant"	20 July 2007
Nahoul lectures to the audience that "we will liberate Al-Aqsa from the filth of the criminal Jews." Sabah (13), a call-in guest, shares aspirations to become a journalist to which Nahoul asks "to photograph the Jews when they are killing Farfour and the little children?" Later, Izz Al-Din from <u>Ramallah</u> calls in and Nahoul suggests that "we will go on <u>Jihad</u> when we grow up." <sup>[28][48]</sup>			
204	9	"Nahoul's Big Day Out"	10 August 2007
Nahoul and Saraa discuss the occupation of Al-Aqsa. Nahoul suggests that "Al-Aqsa is very sad. Al-Aqsa is being held prisoner and is besieged by the criminal murderers of children. We must arise in order to take revenge upon the criminal Jews, the occupying Zionists." Nahoul then instructs the audience how to get hold of the key to Al-Aqsa just as <u>Saladin</u> had done when he liberated it. This key, Nahoul explains is achieved through morning prayer, blood, sacrifice, pain, martyrs, and endurance. Saraa then suggests they examine what Nahoul has been doing recently, emphasizing a visit to the <u>Gaza Zoo</u> where he abused animals to entertain a group of children – connected to a story from the Hadith in which "a woman went to hell because she locked up a cat without feeding it or letting it eat on its own." <sup>[29][52][53][54]</sup>			
205	10	"Nahoul & Saraa's Feast of the Sacrifice Extravaganza"	21 December 2007
It is <u>The Feast of the Sacrifice</u> and Saraa specially sings for the audience and an Al-Aqsa news reporter a version of the song originally sung by Harwa in episode 103 about "liberat[ing] [Palestine] from Tiberias to Anaba". Saraa has backup vocals from a male choir. Saraa sings that "we liberated Gaza by force not by Oslo or by Taba." She continues that "Rafah sings, and the <u>Kalashnikov</u> replies." The songs ends with Saraa singing "Oh Gaza, the first stone (of the <u>intifada</u> ) where we celebrated our victory – raise your sail for the sailors your lighthouse illuminate the sea of blood." When the song is finished she joins Nahoul who is outside with a neck tie and a party hat on. Saraa asks Nahoul whether he would like to give holiday greetings for the Feast of the Sacrifice, but Nahoul exclaims: "Should I convey greetings to my brother who was martyred in the First Intifada, at the hands of the Zionist Jews? To my second brother who was martyred in the Second Intifada? To my aunt who was martyred because of the <u>siege</u> , or to her orphans? My mother who suffers from diabetes or my father who suffers from <u>hepatitis C</u> ? Who should I convey greetings to Saraa? You're rubbing salt on my wounds." Hadil, a call-in guest discusses the sacrifice of a calf that their family made and then Yaquin (13), from Gaza calls in and Nahoul laughs at her, unable to remember her name. Nahoul's voice is considerably lower-pitched in this episode and it is probable that his part is performed by a different actor than normally. <sup>[55][56]</sup>			
206	11	"Assoud Arrives"	1 February 2008
Nahoul is deathly ill. His parents explain that they tried to bring him "to <u>Al-Arish</u> , but we couldn't get [Nahoul] to Egypt to have an operation." They then cry that "all the children of Palestine are dying without treatment." After Nahoul dies, the audience is introduced to his brother, a rabbit named Assoud. When Assoud asks where Nahoul is, the parents at first pretend that he has gone on a walk at night and will be back shortly, but then they finally tell Assoud that "your brother Nahoul died a martyr's death." Assoud is heartbroken and determines to take up Nahoul's path just as Nahoul had taken up Farfour's. Travelling to Al-Aqsa TV headquarters, Assoud declares to the audience that "I come from <u>the diaspora</u> carrying the Key of Return.			



Allah willing, we will use this key to liberate our Al-Aqsa." Saraa greets Assoud and explains to the audience that he will now be the new co-host. Assoud asks Saraa "we are all martyrdom-seekers are we not, Saraa?" and Saraa replies "Of course we are," to which Assoud responds "we will liberate Al-Aqsa from the filth of those Zionists." Assoud introduces the concept that the viewers compose the "soldiers of the Pioneers of Tomorrow" and the show ends with Assoud's famous declaration: "I, Assoud, will get rid of the Jews, Allah willing, and I will eat them up, Allah willing, right?" to which Saraa optimistically replies "Allah willing."<sup>[31]</sup><sup>[57]</sup><sup>[58]</sup>



### Season 3: February 2008 – January 2009

#	Total	Title	Original airdate
301	12	"Assoud's Tale"	8 February 2008
Assoud the rabbit says he sneaked in from Egypt when the <u>Gaza fence was breached</u> . <sup>[59]</sup> He and Saraa discuss retaking Tel Aviv, which they say was originally Tel-Rabia. <sup>[30]</sup> The show ended with a song that declared: "We will never recognise <u>Israel</u> , until we liberate our homeland from the <u>Zionist</u> filth."			
302	13	"Assoud Vs. Denmark"	15 February 2008
Assoud rails against the Danish <u>Jyllands-Posten</u> cartoonists responsible for the Muhammad cartoons following their reprinting. He and Saraa discuss redeeming Muhammad "with [their] souls, [their] blood, and [their] hearts" with Amani, a call-in guest. They warn the cartoonists that "Allah shall pay them back for their mockery." Assoud asks "Do you boycott Israeli and <u>Danish</u> products?" and Saraa instructs Amani that "all of [them] will definitely boycott <u>Danish</u> products and even before that, [they] will boycott Israeli products." <sup>[58][60][61][62]</sup>			
303	14	"Assoud's History Lesson"	9 May 2008
Assoud visits his surviving grandfather (the first having been killed in episode 105) who explains to Assoud the history of the cities in Palestine. In answer to Assoud's questions about where the family had originally lived, Assoud's grandfather tells Assoud that they lived in Tel Al-Rabi'. Assoud tells the old man that "there's no such place called Tel Al-Rabi'," and Assoud inquires if he has "gone senile." Assoud's grandfather is very angry and exclaims that "My head still works just fine. Are you trying to confuse me? I'm not senile yet. I have documents and proof." The grandfather explains that "the Zionists and Jews Hebraicised the name to 'Tel Aviv.'" He goes on to say that "It has been Tel Al-Rabi' for generations, on the land of Palestine, right next to <u>Yafa</u> ... from the days of the British and even before." As proof the grandfather offers papers, documents, and land deeds covering the lands, fields, trees, and houses and claims that "I can even show you the key." The grandfather questions where the names currently in use had come from and suggests that "The name Tel Al-Rabi' has been forged by the Jews and Hebraicised to 'Tel Aviv.'" They invented all these names. 'Ashdod' is, in fact, Isdud. 'Ashkelon' is, in fact, Al-Majdal. Al-Sab' is called 'Beer Sheva'! ... <u>Yafa</u> , <u>Al-Lydd</u> , <u>Al-Ramla</u> , <u>Al-Sab'</u> , -they changed all these names and Hebraicised them." He concludes that "it's all a lie these are all pseudonyms" and this prompts Assoud to apologise that "it's not our fault. It's the fault of the school curricula." <sup>[63]</sup>			
304	15	"Assoud Steals"	11 July 2008
Assoud is tempted to steal "one or two bills" from his father's "stash," but is smitten with conscience. Shaitan then arrives and promises Assoud that "nobody would see you or know about this." Assoud relents and takes two bills despite Shaitan's recommendation to take three. Later, a call-in guest chides Assoud for his theft, explaining that his actions had "caused problems between [his] parents." The guest goes on to explain that "stealing leads to Hell," and then quotes the Muhammad in the Koran as having stated that "if my daughter Fatima had stolen, I would have chopped off her hand." Assoud is told that "If you were in Saudi Arabia now, they would chop off your hand." Saraa takes notes and discusses Assoud's punishment with call-in guests, Asmaa and Nur, who in deference to the Koran agree that Assoud's hand should be cut off. Assoud begs for mercy. On Assoud's request for clarification, Nur opines that if Saraa were to steal her hand should not be cut off, that he never stole so much as a <u>shekel</u> even as a child, and that if Assoud has repented and promised never to do it again then his hand should remain attached. Saraa offers as a compromise that "if we don't chop off his hand, maybe we should chop off his ear." Assoud again begs for mercy as Saraa smiles at the camera. <sup>[64]</sup>			
305	16	"Assoud is Martyred"	2 January 2009
Assoud is gravely injured during Israeli attacks on Gaza during the <u>2008–2009 Israel–Gaza conflict</u> . He succumbs to his injuries and dies some time later in the hospital. <sup>[32]</sup>			

## Season 4: February–October 2009

#	Total	Title	Original airdate
401	17	"Nassur Visits the Gaza Strip"	13 February 2009
Nassur has arrived in Gaza Strip just in time to become Saraa's new co-host. In his debut episode, Nassur shares with the audience his reasons for coming. These reasons include becoming one of the mujahideen, becoming a member of the 'Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, "wag[ing] Jihad," and "carry[ing] a gun." These activities will all be performed in order to "defend the children of Palestine". <sup>[35]</sup>			
402	18	"Saraa's Song"	20 March 2009
Tomorrow's Pioneers has broadcast Saraa's first music video as the central focus of one episode. In this video, Saraa sings about the Hamas youth movement, its presence in the schools, and of the division between Israel and Palestine. The video also features footage of children throwing fanciful darts at a <u>Star of David</u> as they sing that "death is honor and victory." <sup>[9]</sup>			
403	19	"Nassur and the Children of Reem Riyashi"	3 July 2009
Nassur and Saraa spend the day with the children of Palestinian suicide-bomber, <u>Reem Riyashi</u> , who is controversially described as <u>shaheeda</u> . The hosts have created a musical re-enactment video of Riyashi's preparation for martyrdom that they display for the children in an attempt to explain that "her homeland [was more precious than] her own flesh and blood." The episode ends with Riyashi's eldest daughter vowing to become a Jihadi martyr when she grows up, and then Saraa delivers a stern warning addressed to "the occupier" that they "will continue in the footsteps of ... Reem Riyashi ... until [they] liberate [their] homeland." <sup>[65]</sup>			
404	20	"Nassur and the Expulsion of the Jews"	22 September 2009
Nassur and Saraa have a disagreement about what the "expulsion" of the "Jews or Zionists" means. Saraa adopts the argument that they should be "chased away" and that "we don't want to do anything to them, just expel them from our land." Nassur, on the other hand, endorses the view that they should be "erased" and that "we want to slaughter them so they will be expelled from our land." Saraa eventually concedes, and the two compromised that "we will expel them from our land using all means, and if they don't want to go peacefully, by words or talking, we'll have to do it by slaughter." Nassur goes on to explain his plan that after the expulsion, <u>Jerusalem</u> will become a new <u>Qaaba</u> -like point of pilgrimage for Muslims. <sup>[66]</sup>			
405	21	"Saraa and the Language of the Enemy"	16 October 2009
Nassur and Saraa discuss with a call-in guest the merits of learning English and Hebrew. Saraa explains that "We ... want to know our enemies' language to know how to have contacts with them." Nassur also reveals that he knows Hebrew. <sup>[67]</sup>			

## Controversies

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### Criticisms and responses

The show, brought to Western attention by pro-Israel organizations such as Palestinian Media Watch and MEMRI, supposedly deals with Islamic traditions and lifestyles, some as innocuous as the importance of drinking milk, and Muslim customs such as performing one's daily prayers, but also advocates messages of Islamism such as "Resistance Jihad", and the loathing of Israel, the capitalist economic system, the United States, and the Western world.<sup>[14]</sup>

According to Palestinian Media Watch, two animal character co-hosts, the Mickey Mouse look-alike Farfour and Nahoul the bee, were used to "champion violence, promote hatred of Israel and preach about world Islamic supremacy." Later in the show's narrative, the characters were, as the show described it, "martyred", with the deaths either directly or implicitly blamed on the Jews, the people of Israel, or those perceived as Zionists.<sup>[68]</sup>

Criticisms concerning the content and methods employed in the broadcast of *Tomorrow's Pioneers* have come from a variety of sources. Israeli officials and critics from the Anti-Defamation League have denounced the program as incendiary and outrageous in content.<sup>[20]</sup> Watchdog groups, Palestinian Media Watch and MEMRI have described the show as "anti-Israeli," and PMW has commented on the show's "champion[ing of] violence, promot[ion of] hatred of Israel and preach[ing] about world Islamic supremacy."<sup>[68]</sup> Within the Arabic community, critics have suggested that the show has potential to introduce bias in children at an age when they are unable to properly differentiate between political viewpoints.<sup>[69]</sup> Harsher Arabic and Palestinian critics have suggested that the show is nothing short of an attempt at the indoctrination of children.<sup>[70]</sup>

On the other hand, defenders of the show have suggested that the show's notoriety stands as yet more proof of the political motivations behind the anti-Arabist and Islamophobic subjection of Palestinians to the strictest scrutiny and subsequent generalizations of Arabs to support an improper negative stereotype. The argument has been advanced that "Israel is following all the Palestinians, large and small, and placing them under a microscope with a predefined concept of culture, media and religion. It only wants to catch up [Palestinians] and accuse them on themes of terrorism."<sup>[4]</sup> Criticism of the show has been regarded as criticism of Islam as a religion.<sup>[71]</sup>

Furthermore, proponents of the show claim that Saraa Barhoum is only an "innocent girl ... incapable of incitement."<sup>[72]</sup> It has also been suggested by a variety of sources that, holding judgment aside, the show's content is simply reflective of the realities of life in the occupied territory.<sup>[4][73][72]</sup> Relatedly, it is argued that Zionist critics in particular are disturbed by the fact that the show provides "Arab and Muslim children [with] the opportunity to participate in [a public forum context] to freely express their real feelings [regarding life in] Palestine."<sup>[72]</sup> Defenders of the show have argued that the reason for the harsh criticism the show has received is that unlike many Arabic television stations Al-Aqsa TV reflects a view of Palestinian thought unfettered by Western social mores.<sup>[74]</sup> The timing of certain critical publications has also been considered provocative.<sup>[72]</sup>

## **Removal by the Palestinian Ministry**

After attracting international attention for its use of the Mickey Mouse-lookalike, Farfour, Palestinian Information Minister Mustafa Barghouti stated the use of the character was a "mistaken approach" and the program was pulled from Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV and placed under review at his ministry's request.<sup>[75]</sup>

Al-Aqsa TV board chairman Fathi Hamad replied that the station would neither pull the program, nor change the subject matter. He stated that "[t]his campaign of criticism is part of a plan orchestrated by the West and the occupying power to attack Islam on the one hand and the Palestinian cause on the other."<sup>[76][77]</sup> An Al-Aqsa TV representative responded to Barghouti's statements, saying that the station will continue to air the show and that "Barghouti misunderstood the issue."<sup>[73]</sup> In a later interview with Al-Aqsa TV, Hamad explained that "the vicious campaign that is being waged by the enemies, and especially the Zionist enemy and American imperialism, is not new. It comes from the framework of the

vicious campaign against our Palestinian people as an addition to the siege placed on our people. Therefore, we are not surprised by this. They want the Palestinian people to renounce its Islamic religion and belief. In response, we say that whenever our Palestinian people resorted to its religion, Allah supported it. Therefore, we will not renounce our faith and our belief, and we will move forward for the sake of Allah. We are holding to this religion because it is the secret of our victory. They try, as much as they can... Not just by waging their attack on the religion in this context, in order to prevent the Islamic upbringing of Palestinian children, but they also want this people to renounce all its Islamic foundation. They are the ones who called to remove the Jihad verses that appear in the Palestinian school curricula. Therefore, we cannot accept this."<sup>[78]</sup>

## Criticism from the United States

On 1 April 2008, Rep. Joseph Crowley submitted House Resolution No. 1069 in the United States House of Representatives, a resolution "[c]ondemning the use of television programming by Hamas to indoctrinate hatred, violence, and anti-Semitism toward Israel in young Palestinian children."<sup>[79][80]</sup> The resolution discusses *Tomorrow's Pioneers* by name, specifically stating that:

Whereas Hamas uses their television network, Al-Aqsa TV, to air a children's show 'Tomorrow's Pioneers' to breed new terrorists through hatred for Israel and Western nations; ... Whereas in February 2008, Hamas used a Bugs Bunny look-alike to indoctrinate children by inciting them toward hatred and violence by telling children that he 'will finish off the Jews and eat them'; Whereas in May 2007, Hamas used a Mickey Mouse look-alike in the same children's program to teach terrorist doctrines to children; ... the House of Representatives condemns Hamas for using a children's television program to incite hatred, violence, and anti-Semitism toward Israel; and demands that Hamas immediately suspend all television programming that incites hatred, violence, and anti-Semitism toward Israel ...<sup>[81]</sup>

## Translation controversy

Several commentators, such as CNN's Arabic department, have claimed that the transcript of the April 13 show (2007) provided by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) contains numerous translation errors and undue emphases.<sup>[82]</sup> Brian Whitaker, the Middle East editor for British newspaper *The Guardian*, wrote in a blog for the newspaper that in the translation of the video, showing Farfour eliciting political comments from a young girl named Sanabel, the MEMRI transcript misrepresents the segment where he asks what she will do, by attributing a sentence said by Farfour, "I'll shoot", to the child while ignoring Sanabel's actual reply ("I'm going to draw a picture").<sup>[82][83]</sup> Whitaker further criticised MEMRI's translation. He and others commented that a statement uttered by the same child, "We're going to [or want to] resist", had been given an unduly aggressive interpretation by MEMRI as "We want to fight". Also, where MEMRI translated the girl as saying "We will annihilate the Jews", Whitaker and others, including Arabic speakers used by CNN, insist that based on careful listening to the low quality video clip, the girl is variously interpreted as saying, "The Jews [will] shoot us"<sup>[82]</sup> or "The Jews are killing us."<sup>[84]</sup> Other sources have also pointed out that MEMRI's translation "I will commit martyrdom" should more accurately have been "I'll become a martyr", a more passive statement.<sup>[85]</sup>

Conservative television host Glenn Beck had planned to run MEMRI's translation on his radio programme but was stopped by his producer. Beck then invited Yigal Carmon, a former colonel of IDF Intelligence and founder and President of MEMRI, on to the programme where Carmon denounced CNN's Arabic translation.<sup>[82]</sup> Carmon defended MEMRI's translation of the show, declaring "Yes, we stand by the translation by the very words, by the context, by the syntax, and every measure of the translation."<sup>[84]</sup>

## Reception and legacy

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*Flavorwire* negatively reviewed the series as "an abomination of modern cinematic technology", stating that:<sup>[86]</sup>

it's shot as one long, static, droning cut, filmed almost entirely within a corner studio whose only décor is makeshift wallpaper of pastel foam alphabet floor mat blocks, and stars the worst Mickey Mouse knockoff ever. What it lacks visually, though, it makes up for in exciting content, regularly featuring such punchy lines as "How will you sacrifice your soul for the sake of Al-Aqsa?" Yikes.

Phil Hall of *Film Threat* called the series "a non-stop assault on good taste and intelligence", criticising the cheap production values and anti-Semitic remarks from the characters,<sup>[87]</sup> while *The Jerusalem Post* commented that the character Farfour was "far from lovable" as he was used to preach violence to children.<sup>[88]</sup>

The series was featured in a segment on a 2007 episode of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.<sup>[89]</sup>

## See also

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- Brainwashing
- Social effects of television
- List of television shows notable for negative reception

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